

apicuous. The charming statue of "A Dancing Girl reposing" (1,320), an Art-Union of London commission, has turned out most satisfactorily in marble. "Cupid Captive" (1,332), and "The Last Drop—a Young Satyr Drinking" (1,361), are life-like, and happily conceived.

1,326. "Statue of Aurora stepping upon the earth, scattering dew," by J. Gibson, R.A. An exquisite impersonation of the morning deity—chiselled with the perfection of a modern Phidias. The use of a colouring matter as used here would, in most hands, produce an effect at once garish, out of keeping, and *infra dig*.

1,325. "Eucharis and Cupid," R. J. Wyatt. A graceful group in marble. 1,328. "A Charming embodiment of Thomson's Lavinia," by J. M. Spence. 1,330. "Innocence," J. H. Foley. "Statue of Florida Wounded by her Lover, from Tasso" (1,338). J. Bell, are amongst the chief attractions of the collection.

1,340. "Una and the Lion," sketch for a statue, J. Hancock. 1,362. "An Elf of the Stream," a sketch, and "Spring" (1,364), "Summer" (1,365), "Autumn" (1,366), and "Winter" (1,367), by F. M. Muller, demand and will repay examination.

The names of Bailey, R.A., Macdowell, R.A., Westmacott, A., are appended to some fine busts. F. Thrupp, Behnes, Kirk, Jones, Wyon, Haydon, &c., severally contribute.

#### ON THE RISE, PROGRESS, AND DECLINE OF ART IN ITALY, AND ITS REVIVAL IN ENGLAND IN THE PRESENT DAY.\*

THE meridian glory of art was of comparatively short duration. Art fell at once almost from its highest elevation to its lowest degradation. The sun of Italian art set, like the sun in the tropics, almost without a twilight; and the careful and contemplative examiner of its history feels as if the sudden change was meant to impress him with the sublime lesson, that there is a limit to all human attainments, and that the tide of art having risen to so high a pitch of excellence, its waves, rolled back upon their native bed, should leave us only the emanations of genius,—the works of those men who had before no precursors, and have since had no peers, and which should remain to all succeeding ages, objects of wonder, admiration, and delight!

Various causes contributed to effect this sudden change in the condition of art, and all writers express different views on the subject. On one hand, a fierce and destructive plague visited Italy, swept like a deadly blight from the Adriatic to the Mediterranean, and laid low the fairest flowers of her genius. Prince and peasant, patron and painter, alike fell before its baneful breath. The aged Titian and his aspiring son were among its earliest victims, and no doubt it had a withering effect upon the prosperity of art.

On the other hand it has been asserted by many authors, that the great moral revolution which ushered in the sixteenth century, which shook Europe to its centre, and changed the aspect of Christendom, exercised an influence prejudicial to the well-being of art; and that in its whirlwind course it bore down the spirit that was most conducive to its growth. With this assertion I am bold to differ; and I cannot but feel that those who hold this opinion, either fully mistake, or strangely misapprehend, the nature of the Reformation; for it is to that great event that I refer. It was a leading object of that mighty movement to effect the emancipation of the human mind from the thraldom of superstition, to dispel the clouds which had for nine successive centuries enveloped Christendom; it had for its object, liberty of thought, of conscience, of inquiry: it had for its object, the "bursting of the bands that had so long confined Christianity, that it might return full of life into a world that had forgotten its former influence." These objects it gloriously accomplished, and with a giant hand opened up fountains of infinite knowledge to the thirsting millions of mankind! We must hold it as a universal axiom that what is morally right cannot be intellectually, or if you please, artistically wrong; and as it was right that the moral atmosphere of Europe should be cleared of the unhealthy vapours with which it was charged, it could not be that in its

accomplishment the *real* interests of art were damaged, or its course impeded, so that we must seek for some other explanation of the cause of its decline. It is true, indeed, that the Reformation closed with an imperative hand, and flung aside those books of legendary fiction from which so many of the painters had selected their subjects; but did it not lift the veil that overhung society, and bid men look for incident in the moving pageantry of life; and did it not at the same time open wide the pages of divine inspiration, and bid them seek from thence themes for contemplation which should not only be capable of pictorial adaptation, but should carry with them the impress of eternal truth.

No doubt the real cause of the decline of art in Italy was the capriciousness and depravity of the general taste, ever fluctuating and uncertain. But it has been always so with human achievements and human distinctions. It is on the same principle that empires have risen, flourished, failed, and passed away; nations and men alike arrive at maturity, alike perish, alike are forgotten! Can you tell me of any thing in the wide circumference of this world's existence, or in the long list of man's achievements, that has for any great length of time maintained an equality of excellence? Change and decay are the most uniform in their action of all the laws of nature; and universal history is in this respect one vast elucidation of a principle that is embodied in perfection in a single blade of grass; there has always been the springing,—the growth,—the full development,—and then, the withering and decay; and with this philosophic view of the subject we must rest satisfied as the only explanation that can be given of the rapid decline of art in the sixteenth century.

Without staying, however, to decide this question, upon which I may be thought to have dwelt already longer than it was needful, it is clear that art *did* decline, and that suddenly, at least in all that constitutes its essential excellence. It is true, that for some years later schools existed in Italy, but they were of the worst possible class, for they generated a host of imitators who were worse than useless, and from the baneful influence of which Italy to this day has not recovered. It is true, also, that some of the best pictures that have ever been executed were produced after this period, but they were exceptions to the general rule; and even they were based upon the works of those painters who had raised the standard of excellence to its height in the age we have just been considering. Originality seemed everywhere to be extinguished.

Thus, the stream of art seemed arrested in its course, or, at least, it was turned into a very different channel; not, indeed, that it was ever lost:—no, gentlemen! as it is often said, "art never was really lost;" but it seems to remind one of that remarkable phenomenon which occurs in the course of a beautiful river of southern Europe, of which travellers relate, that, after it has gathered its rapid and abundant waters from the mountain heights, and poured them in graceful windings through the valleys of Carniola, on the confines of Austria, spreading beauty and fertility on every side,—it suddenly,—and without any apparent cause, takes an abrupt turn, and plunging precipitately into a cavern that yawns to receive it, disappears at once in the profound abyss. After being traced to some distance within the grotto of Adelsburg, it is altogether lost to view; but, wonderful to relate, though lost to sight, it still exists, for, at a few leagues distance, it *reappears*, suddenly bursting from the earth, not an infant stream, but a full-grown river, and, rejoicing in its recovered freedom, flows on without interruption till it reaches the sea.

Gentlemen, it was just so with the *stream* of art, and shall I say that it has been reserved for the present age to witness its emancipation, and that, after three centuries of obscurity, it emerges once more to light, and life, and liberty?

If you are not disposed to assent to the idea that such is the case, and that the position of England in the nineteenth century is as favourable to the growth of art as Italy was in the sixteenth, you will at least agree that there is a striking and healthful change in the public mind in this respect. Men are no longer in the habit of regarding art as a mere luxury,

and the study of art as a mere accomplishment; they are beginning to assign to it its proper place in the scale of intellectual pursuits, and to acknowledge that it is capable, when rightly employed, of stimulating the best reflections, and implanting the soundest morals; that its tendency is to refine the taste, to mature the judgment, to extend the powers of observation, and in every way to improve the mind! The public are beginning to manifest a greater interest in the *mental* excellencies of the works that are submitted to them, and to care less for the *straws* of mechanical dexterity which float only upon the surface, than for those pearls of sentiment and truth which always lie deep. But without employing longer time in considering the manner in which this improvement shows itself among the masses of the community, we come to consider the question of Government patronage, and the influence it may be expected to exert on the arts, as it is now a leading feature in its existence amongst us.

And here let us observe, that up to the Medician days of art, no Government had taken up its cause, and given to it a special protection and support. The assistance it had received from the papal heads of the church was mostly confined to the production of mosaics; but in the middle of the fifteenth century, the Medician family, who then exercised the powers of sovereignty in Florence, adopted the arts as objects worthy of their especial protection; and to their high example and influence painting is mainly indebted for those brilliant productions of which we have already spoken. From that time the progress of art was a triumph till it reached its height. Beginning under the government of Cosmo de Medici, we trace a steady progressive advancement up to the time of Leo X.; so that, if we are right in arriving at conclusions from the experience of past ages, we must feel that it is desirable to have the protection and countenance of the legislative power. So far we may congratulate ourselves that England has at length been induced to take into consideration the claims of art, and to recognise it as a national benefit. What may be the results of the measures proposed, or with what spirit they may be carried out, remains to be seen. At present we cannot think the result at all satisfactory or encouraging. The experiments which have been made, though in some respects successful, have not been such as to give the country a correct idea of the state of British art and the power of her artists on the one hand, or to give the painters and sculptors full confidence in the Government arrangements on the other hand. The *competitions* have been conducted in a manner involving so much uncertainty, that scarcely any of our greatest painters have been induced to enter the arena; nor has the liberality of the Commission been sufficient to enable those who have the struggle of existence to maintain, to depart from the beaten track in which they have been seeking the means of livelihood. When we examine the spirit and manner in which public competitions were conducted in the days of Florentine prosperity, from the beginning of the fifteenth century, and compare it with the competitions of our own times, we find it difficult to sustain any great hope of steady assistance from such a quarter for the present. When, for instance, we read the account given by Vasari of the competition for the gates of San Giovanni (which may be justly considered an epoch in the history of art, and which rendered Ghiberti so illustrious), and compare the munificence of the Florentine republic with the parsimonious character of our own Government, we find a difference which tells sadly against us. It may be interesting to give a brief account of the competition referred to.

The signori, or members of the chief government of Florence, acting in concert with the consoli, or representatives of the guilds, were desirous in the year 1401 of erecting a second gate to the baptistry of St. John, as a companion to the first gate, which was erected in 1330, and had been for half a century the admiration of all Italy; they made known this munificent intention to all the Italian States, and consequently the best artists of the day assembled from Florence, Siena, and Bologna, to enter into the competition. From among a great number seven, were selected as